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REQUEST FOR THE INCLUSION OF AN ADDITIONAL ITEM IN THE PROVISIONAL AGENDA OF THE FORTY-SIXTH SESSION

EXPLOITATION OF THE ENVIRONMENT AS A WEAPON IN TIMES OF ARMED CONFLICT AND THE TAKING OF PRACTICAL MEASURES TO PREVENT SUCH EXPLOITATION

Note verbale dated 5 July 1991 from the Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Permanent Mission of Jordan to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

The Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan to the United Nations presents his compliments to the Secretary-General of the United Nations and has the honour to inform him that the Jordanian Government, in accordance with rule 13 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly, would like to propose the inclusion of an item in the provisional agenda of the forty-sixth General Assembly entitled "Exploitation of the environment as a weapon in times of armed conflict and the taking of practical measures to prevent such exploitation". In accordance with rule 20 of the rules of procedure, an explanatory memorandum is annexed to this request.

ANNEX

Explanatory memorandum

1. In a world where all humanity is ecologically vulnerable, it has become evident that warfare is no longer a tenable policy option for civilized nations. It is common knowledge that the recent military conflict in the Gulf had an impact of tragic proportions on both the people of the region and the environment. Scientists have calculated that it will take decades to recover from the environmental damage resultant from the confrontation. This emphasizes the urgent necessity to prevent any further exploitation of the environment as a means of indiscriminate destruction. The environment must be taken into consideration from the initial stages of conflict decision-making by both politicians and military decision makers. In our approach to the next millennium, it is evident that closer cooperation between all nations is essential if we are to avoid further environmental destruction and conflict. All should realize that environmental degradation is not limited to the confines of any one nation State.

2. The existing 1977 United Nations Convention on the Prohibition of Military or Any Other Hostile Use of Environmental Modification Techniques was revealed as being painfully inadequate during the Gulf conflict. We find that the terms of the existing convention are so broad and vague as to be virtually impossible to enforce. We also find no provision for a mechanism capable of the investigation and settlement of any future disputes under the Convention. Furthermore, the Convention does not provide for advanced environmental scientific data to be made available to all States at the initial stages of crisis prevention.

3. We therefore propose that the General Assembly establish a committee to examine the above-mentioned problems, the committee to submit to the General Assembly, if possible by the forty-seventh session in 1992, proposals for an efficient mechanism to combat the exploitation of the environment in times of armed conflict. We believe that this may lead to the drafting of a new treaty and we trust that any such treaty would give all humanity the confidence to face a more peaceful future. Pending the finalization of any such treaty, we would suggest that all nations should be invited to make unilateral decisions along the lines of the treaty.

4. In recognition of the importance of the free flow of information, we urge the committee to consider the implementation of a United Nations Environmental Data Base as a confidence-building measure and another step towards the international protection of the environment. This would further the precedent recommendations of the Independent Commission on International Humanitarian Issues on the international and institutional framework for disaster management as detailed in their report, first published in 1988, under the apt title of "Winning the Human Race".